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~ Carol Grace

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Is Age Just A Number?



There is no old age. There is, as there always was, just you.

~ Carol Grace

In my estate planning and elder law practice, we talk about age all the time. When do people start to worry about age? How old is "old"? Why do some people seem to be more comfortable with their age than others?

I have always been a big believer in controlling what I can control and ignoring what I can't. And age itself -- that is, the day-to-day process of growing older -- is something that is totally outside of my control. There's an old quote by an unknown author: *"Do not regret growing older. It is a privilege denied to many."* With that quote in mind, my view of age has always been that growing older is a privilege, and certainly it's better than the alternative, so why would I worry about it.

That said, while I normally ignore age and think of it as just another number, as I turn 53 this month I'm inspired to think and write about growing up and growing older.

Loads of scientific studies have been conducted and billions of dollars spent in the hopes of finding the fountain of youth, that elusive silver bullet that stops or reverses the aging process. Just a quick flip of the remote will result in you viewing commercials for more makeup, hair, exercise and sports products than you could use in a lifetime.

For just a few bucks I can have abs of steel and buns of steel (although my unscientific research has revealed that my buns of steel will require a three-set video, while my abs of steel will only require one video). I can have killer arms, although I'm not really sure what that means. I can kick, punch, dance or stretch my way back to my youth.

Standing in the checkout line at CVS, I can buy a magazine that will tell me the "10 All-Natural Ways to Stay Young", or "5 Anti-Aging Tips", or "4 Foods That Will Help Me Live To 100".

Despite the scientific studies and billions of dollars spent on staying young, so far the fountain of youth has remained a myth and a mystery.

The focus on youth will not stop anytime soon. Why? Because with age comes the negative stereotypes -- the aches and pains, feebleness, memory loss, loss of mobility. Who wants that, right?

When we are teenagers and in our early twenties, we want to be older. We want to be adults and struggle to prove that we are grown up. I remember when I was 18 or 19 and my mother would call my brothers and I "kids". *"Time for dinner, kids!"* or *"Can you kids come help me with this?"* Our typical response back then was: *"Mom, we're not kids, stop calling us that."*

When did that stop? Now, it's flattering when she calls us kids. No more objections from us, for sure.

There is no fine line between young and old. No black and white. No one day where you go to sleep young and wake up old. Why is that? Well, it's because the words "young" and "old" are vague and can't be defined.

Yes, there may be signs that you are growing older, but there's not a clear-cut cliff you fall off and can never climb back.

Bob Hope said that *"Middle age is when your age starts to show around your middle."*

Writer Jim Fiebig put it well when he said *"Age does not diminish the extreme disappointment of having a scoop of ice cream fall from the cone."*

About growing older, one of my clients recently told me *"I still have a full deck, I just shuffle a little slower now."*

An 8 year-old sees the world in a whole different way than a 15 year-old, who sees the world in a whole different way than a 25 year-old, and on, and on, and on. Certainly you have different traits, different experiences and different stories to tell when you are 80 than when you were 32.

This focus on age has brought me back to the old cliché that life is a journey, not a destination. A fitting quote by Terri Guillemets: *"The sun shines different ways in summer and winter. We shine different ways in the seasons of our lives."*

One of my favorite songs is *Little Wonders* by Rob Thomas. The chorus goes like this:

*Our lives are made,
In these small hours,
These little wonders,
These twists and turns of fate,
Time falls away,
But these small hours,
These small hours,
Still remain.*

We each have our own "small hours" that shape us over the years into who we are.

"Time falls away, but these small hours, still remain." Some hours are so beautiful that they fill your heart. Falling in love, walking down the aisle, the birth of a child, a special vacation. Or maybe just a kind word from a friend or even a stranger at a critical moment of your life.

Some hours are so painful that you feel like your heart was ripped from your chest. Losing a loved one, finding out about an illness, feeling abandoned, sitting in a hospital room listening to machines drowning out shallow breathing.

As we age, we collect these small hours. They are our highs and lows, our dazzling colors and darkness in an otherwise gray day. They are our journeys. And each one of us has our own unique small hours, our own special journeys.

So, as I grow another year older this month, I am inspired to think and write about age. What I have concluded is this: *Why should I, or anyone else, be the judge of when someone is old?*

I like to think that, as John Barrymore puts it, *"A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams."* When you look at it that way, you have total control over whether or not you are old. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Glenn Matcun is one of the founders of the law firm of Matcun, Thomas & Olson, PLLC with offices in Livingston County and Macomb County. He is an estate planning and elder law attorney, and is accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Check out his new Elder Care Whiteboard VideoTM Series at www.MichiganEstatePlans.com and learn in plain English how to deal with estate planning, elder law, Medicaid, nursing home, probate or Veterans' benefits issues. You can email him at gmatcun@mtolaw.com or call (517) 548-7400 or (586) 751-0779 for a free consultation.

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LOCATIONS

Howell Office
McPherson Mansion
915 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 6
Howell, Michigan 48843
Phone: (517) 548-7400 • Fax: (517) 548-7410

Clinton Township Office
43570 Garfield, Suite 101
Clinton Township, Michigan 48035
Phone: (586) 751-0779 • Fax: (586) 948-9314